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## Brain exercises can help keep mind healthy

*By Suzanne Weiss  
Herald Times Reporter*

MANITOWOC — Flexing mental muscle is part of the trend toward leading healthier lifestyles.

"Our brain is one of the most important organs that we have. You have to take care of it," said Tracy Reinhard, director of resident services for Felician Village, a senior care facility in Manitowoc. "You have the opportunity to strengthen the brain as you give it more information."

"Studies have also shown that engaging in mental tasks is associated with a lower risk for Alzheimer's," said Lisa Hagenow, brain health coordinator for Felician Village, which is kicking off a new brain health program this month for its residents and the community.

The program is the brainchild of the facility's chief executive officer, Pat Kaldor, as management continues to look at ways to enhance its quality-of-life activities and preventative health care, Reinhard said.

It's never too late to start focusing on brain health, she said.

"It's also never too early," Hagenow said. "You never want to wait until you are having trouble concentrating or learning."

There are four main components to maintaining a healthy brain.

"The first would be physical exercise," Hagenow said. "It's important to maintain good blood flow to the brain. That encourages growth of new brain cells. The second piece is a healthy cardiac diet, a low-cholesterol, low-fat Mediterranean diet."

"A very important piece of brain health is the third component, socialization," Reinhard said. "It's connecting with your peers. As seniors age, we see that they have a tendency to withdraw. They tend to lose people in their life. It's very important for them to continue to socialize and maintain relationships."

By reducing stress, socialization can help maintain healthy connections among brain cells and can improve memory and concentration, Hagenow said.

Mind fitness activities are the fourth component of brain health, she said.

"That is a big part of the role that I will be playing — engaging people in those mind fitness activities. Those can focus on memory, problem-solving abilities, being creative and using your imagination," Hagenow said.

The center will offer resources and activities. Hagenow will organize weekly sessions of mind fitness activities for residents starting this month. Sessions will be offered to the public later in the year.

Story telling and recalling the past is one way to strengthen the brain, Reinhard said.

"A lot of people do crossword puzzles, Sudoku, reading and writing," Hagenow said. "Studies have shown that reading out loud is even more beneficial than just reading."

High-tech equipment also can play a role.

The center's hand-held Nintendo DS video game offers residents such activities as math and word puzzles.

Multiple Wiis on campus combine physical fitness with mind fitness plus socialization.

The new Its Never 2 Late computer system can be used for therapy, brainteasers, karaoke, "travel" to another country, simulated flying and driving, viewing history clips and funny videos and sending e-mail.

Features such as a touch screen, enlarged icons, keyboard with large letters and an easier click system make it easy for older and non-experienced computer users, Hagenow said.

Resident Ray Johnson likes to bowl and golf on the Wii and enjoys watching reruns of "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson on the computer, asking it questions and playing games such as blackjack and poker.

"I do play the game spider and I also used to play quite a bit of solitaire. I still use it simply because you can play three-handed sheepshead," he said via an e-mail from Hagenow.

The future of the program has some laughs in store as well. Hagenow and life enrichment coordinator Jennifer Collins plan to become certified laughing coaches and offer a laughing club in spring.

"Laughing is a great way to relieve stress and improve cognitive function and maintain brain health," Reinhard said.

The public is invited to learn more about the benefits of brain health activities by attending "Engage Your Brain," at 1:30 p.m. Jan. 26 and again Feb. 2 in the Glab Lounge at The Gardens on the Felician Village campus, 1700 S. 18th St. The program is free and refreshments will be served.

To learn more, call (920) 684-7171, Ext. 338.

## Additional Facts

If you go

What: "Engage Your Brain" — learn about the benefits of brain health activities

When: 1:30 p.m. Jan. 26 and Feb. 2

Where: Glab Lounge at The Gardens on the Felician Village campus, 1700 S. 18th St., Manitowoc

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